

## D&D Fiction

# Shadows of Stormreach: Chapter 2

*Eberron Fiction  
by Keith Baker*



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*The bustling frontier city of Stormreach, a cauldron on ambition and secret plots, has grown safe and secure as the only gateway to the riches of Xen'drik. But now danger threatens!*

So begins the introduction to [Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach](#). Can you discover the secret mysteries that threaten Stormreach's very existence? For that, you'll need to learn more about this city of Eberron -- continuing with this second chapter in Keith Baker's latest tale: *Shadows of Stormreach*.

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The air rushed from Shadow's lungs as her foe slammed her into the ground. His teeth flashed toward her throat.

*I'm not going to be killed by a... a... white rat!*

Adrenaline burned in Shadow's veins. She smashed her forehead into his nose, deflecting the bite and earning a surprised yelp. The strange creature was holding her wrists, but in that moment of distraction she was able to twist in his grip, digging a deep furrow along his arm with her sword.



The rat didn't even wince, and the wound closed the instant the blade passed through the flesh. He tightened his grip, pinning her against the ground. His jaws opened wide...

A brilliant blue light flared. The ratman stiffened, and the light flowed out of his beady red eyes as the smell of scorched fur filled the air. Flesh twisted, and a moment later he was just a pale halfling, wisps of smoke rising from his back. Shadow shifted her weight, and the corpse tumbled to the ground.

An elf stood over her, a tall woman with skin as pale as the dead ratman's fur, though her hair was midnight black. Arcs of blue energy flickered around the headpiece of the staff, remnants of the power she'd unleashed.

Petra helped Shadow to her feet, her expression calm and distant. Shadow hated the way the elf never showed emotion. "Couldn't you have done that before he reached me?" she said.

"I follow my own path," Petra replied. "If you want to help Spike, use your dagger."

Shadow wanted to ask why, but this was no time for discussion; Marcus and Spike were still locked in battle. And as much as she hated the sorceress's mysterious ways, Shadow was certain Petra knew what she was talking about. Shadow turned and raced for Spike, drawing her dagger as she ran.

The warforged put up a fierce defense against his foe. The dwarf-rat wasn't bleeding, but he was unsteady on his feet, with a posture that hinted at broken bones. The rat-creatures might be resistant to the bite of steel, but the sheer force of Spike's blows was taking its toll. Shadow had seen Spike wrestle an ogre to the ground, and she knew the strength the warforged could bring to bear in full battle-frenzy. But there were deep gouges in Spike's armor, and the light in his heartstones pulsed erratically.

The dwarf was completely focused on his warforged opponent. Even as Shadow moved closer, he ducked beneath a wild axe blow and jabbed his blade into a gap in Spike's plating. When he withdrew the sword, it was covered with thick black fluid.

*I'll never hear the end of this*, Shadow thought. The dwarf didn't even notice her as she stepped behind him. For a moment, she was a child again, listening to her mentor speak about anatomy and the benefits of the swift strike. *Hopefully rat-dwarves have the same innards as the rest of 'em*, she thought, and she lashed out with her dagger.

The rat-creature spasmed, and blood flowed as Shadow pulled the blade free. Her victim dropped to his knees, transforming while he fell. As Spike's axe descended for a final blow, there was another flash of blue light behind them as Petra helped Marcus with his enemy.

Shadow studied the ruin at her feet. Blood pooled in the cobblestones, and despite the many horrors she'd seen over the last few years, Shadow could feel the bile rising at the back of her throat.

*Just another night in Stormreach.*

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The last echoes of the tenth bell faded into the night. Shadow sighed, examining her torn and bloody shirt. In the corner of the room, Petra knelt over Spike. The warforged soldier was gravely damaged, but just as Marcus could heal injured flesh, Petra could restore steel and stone.

"I'm still waiting," Shadow said.

Marcus had refused to discuss the battle until they were safely back in their room at the Rusty Nail. He'd stripped off his armor to expose his injuries and was binding the last cut with a tongue of flame. He clenched his jaw against the pain. As the fire faded, he turned to meet Shadow's gaze.

"Wererats," he said.

Shadow waited. A moment passed, and Marcus said nothing more.

"So?" Shadow said. "The thugs who tried to kill me turned into war-rats. That part, I noticed. But that doesn't tell me why you started acting like ... well, Spike."

“Where?” said Spike, sitting up. Petra pushed him back down to the floor, continuing her work.

“*Wererats*, not war-rats,” Marcus said. “Don’t you know anything about history?”

Shadow shrugged. “My tutors focused on other subjects.”

“Twelve ways to cut a purse-string?”

“Please. I came up with fifty while I was still in the cradle.”

Marcus shook his head, a finger straying to the silver arrowhead that hung from the chain around his neck. “Your soul can still find the light, little one. The wererat... it has no such hope. These creatures are lost spirits, and the mystical infection they carry can corrupt and destroy even the most innocent soul. Over a century ago, the Church of the Silver Flame went to war in a crusade to expunge this scourge from our world. We drove the shapeshifters from Khorvaire.”

“All hail the selfless heroes of the church.” Petra’s voice was cool and sardonic. “You may have studied history, priest, but I have lived it. I was there for your so-called crusade, and I saw nothing but horror... on both sides of the battle.”

Marcus’s grip tightened around the haft of his morningstar. Shadow stepped between them.

“Drop it, Pet,” she said. “You too, Marcus. You’re telling me you put all our lives at risk because of a history lesson?”

“It is my duty to fight these horrors, which is why you’re going to tell me exactly what you were doing earlier tonight.” Marcus made a sweeping gesture with his morningstar. He was angry, and the motion was a little sharper than he might have intended. But Shadow never felt threatened. She’d been through fire with the priest, and she knew he wouldn’t hurt her.

Spike, apparently, did not share her confidence.

The warforged soldier rose up in the blink of an eye. He smashed into Marcus, three hundred pounds of metal moving with the speed of a warhorse. The priest flew across the room, dropping his weapon as he crashed into the wardrobe.

“Spike!” Shadow shouted.

Marcus groaned, but he knew better than to stand; this was hardly the first misunderstanding he’d had with the warforged.

Spike turned to face her, his eyes glowing with emerald light. “This is the fifth time he has threatened you.”

“Spike...”

“My instructions are to protect you from all harm and—”

“You just wanted to hit something. And we both know it.”

“He—”

“Spike!”

The light in Spike’s eyes dimmed, and he bowed his head. Shadow could see Petra standing in the corner, smiling faintly. She remembered how Petra had waited until the last moment to save her from the rat. The elf was a powerful ally, but of the four of them... Petra was the last she’d put her trust in.

Shadow walked over to Marcus. She was too short to help him to his feet, but she put a hand on his leg.

“I’m sorry. You know how Spike gets when he hasn’t been able to hurt anything for a few hours.”

“Then let’s give him something to hurt,” Marcus said, standing up. “If there are any more of those creatures in Stormreach, I want them dead. That was no random encounter. They knew who you were. You told us where to meet you... you *knew* something like this could happen. What’s going on, Shadow?”

“Well, as to that...” Shadow weighed the truth in her mind, trying to decide just how much she should reveal. “Link asked me to look into the activities of these bilge rats. Because of my family’s connections in the... shipping business, I thought I might be able to deal with them directly if I talked to them.”

Petra laughed, a soft and musical sound. “So these thugs used to work for your father, but now they’ve found a new master. Is there no honor among thieves?”

“I wouldn’t expect you to understand,” Shadow said.

“I suppose you should send a little message to your family?” Petra said. “Surely they’ll deal with these traitors.”

Shadow held back her anger. Spike was always looking for a chance to hit something, but Petra preferred emotional jabs. “Spike, I want you to fetch my good friend Link. And Marcus, get your armor back on. Tonight we go hunting for rats.”

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## About the Author

**Keith Baker** has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the ***Eberron** Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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